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ABSTRACT

Maintaining effective leadership in vocational agriculture education with reduced resources will require change. Change is needed in four areas: effective leadership/reduced resources, communications/involvement, concerns, and use of others. In the area of effective leadership in an age of reduced resources, the responsibilities of supervisors in agricultural education need to be defined and executed. In the area of communications/involvement, it is necessary to reduce the production image that tends to cling to agricultural education in the United States. It is suggested that efforts be made to address the issue of agribusiness curriculum versus production agriculture. The area of concerns is focused on the problem of maintaining qualified state staff. To do so, salaries must be made comparable to local salaries, the role of supervisors must be defined and supported, job descriptions should require extensive experience in agricultural education, and extended employment should be offered. Finally, in the area of use of others, the following individuals or groups should be enlisted to assist in maintaining effective leadership with reduced resources: vocational agriculture instructors, grassroots organizations, political figures, agriculture industry representatives, technical skill committees, farm organizations and commodity groups, teacher education groups, secondary and postsecondary administrators, and students and their parents. Working in these four areas can help agricultural education leaders improve their programs in an era of limited resources. (KC)

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HOW CAN WE MAINTAIN EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION WITH THE REDUCED RESOURCES

by Ted D. Ward, Ph.D.
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Maintaining effective leadership in vocational agriculture education with reduced resources will require change. We do have a good program, but we need to clean it up. The leadership of Agricultural Education must accept the idea of change, but let's do more. Let's develop a program with changes we can live with instead of waiting for someone outside our field to make them for us. To achieve this end, let us address these four areas --

1. Effective leadership/reduced resources,
2. Communications/involvement,
3. Concerns, and
4. Utilization of others.

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1. Effective Leadership - Our key responsibility is to serve as a supervisor in agricultural education. Who establishes the priority for supervisors in agricultural education? Is it: (a) the State Education Department, (b) the Vocation head, or (c) the State Vocational Agriculture Teachers Association? Over the years, each state supervisor has conducted himself or herself in a manner in which that person felt each was promoting agricultural education within the state. During recent years with the elimination of staff, the changes in funds, etc., many have seen new job descriptions arise. Have those job descriptions, in fact, allowed the state staff to serve as supervisors in agricultural education, or have they allowed them to take on a different capacity which has not been congruent with the role of supervisors in prior years? We needed to identify the responsibilities for supervisors and return to that mission.

2. Communications/Involvement - We have to work diligently to reduce the production image that tends to cross agricultural education throughout the United States. Over the years, starting back with the Smith-Hughes Act, the emphasis was on production agriculture. It wasn't until the 1963 Act that emphasis began

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to move away from production agriculture. However, because of the strength that production agriculture had established at that time, we are still working some 23 years later to reduce the production image and expand upon the agribusiness opportunities. There is a need to provide a validated base on which to recognize competencies that promote agribusiness as well as production agriculture.

It is suggested that a "true" effort be undertaken to identify what really is agribusiness versus what many perceive to be agribusiness. One method to accomplish this task would be to provide internships to teachers of vocational agriculture in the field of agribusiness. This activity would help identify the "true" agribusiness concepts and assist in validating competencies. Another area would be agribusiness competitive events. Currently the majority of the national contests tend to lend themselves to the area of production agriculture. Other than floriculture and landscape/nursery competitive contests, the remainder essentially have roots in the field of production agriculture. Additional emphasis on agribusiness could be stressed if there were an agribusiness competitive event.

It is suggested that an effort of cooperation should be undertaken by the teacher education staff and teacher supervision staff in each state to address the issue of agribusiness curriculum versus production.

3. Concerns - The basic concern is that of maintaining qualified state staff. Reasons for maintaining qualified state staff included:

A. Salaries

Salaries are tied to a state salary schedule. In many instances, the salary schedules are less than salary schedules provided by local educational agencies. Thus, it is difficult to entice vocational instructors to become state staff personnel because of lowered salaries.

B. Expanded Activities

The expectations of the state staff have expanded from that of supervising secondary vocational agriculture and the FFA to that of supervising adults, postsecondary education, the National Young Farmers organization, broadened FFA activities, and caring for those mandates specified in the various vocational acts.

C. No Longer a Supervisors Job

Many vocational agriculture instructors consider state staff personnel as "snoopervisors," not supervisors. This would suggest that the basic responsibility as identified under effective leadership be returned to our role. People do not wish to become state staff personnel because they are perceived to be snoopervisors -- a short stop, a short visit, no assistance -- and not out there to supervise and provide technical assistance. This concept needs to be dispelled and the new role strengthened.

D. Misconceptions of the Field by Others as to the Role of Supervisors Responsibility

Many teachers of vocational agriculture and others observe what is taking place and they do not understand or do not perceive in the right perspective what is actually taking place. Supervisors have indicated that once they have joined the state staff and become involved in state supervision activities, it was entirely different than they had envisioned it to be when they were an instructor of vocational agriculture.

E. Accepting Bureaucracy

Accepting bureaucracy becomes very difficult for many to do. In a local setting action takes place very quickly; however at the state level, it appears that it may take some time. The tremendous amount

of paper work, such as forms and reports, that are required in many states for specific roles and responsibilities are a part of the bureaucracy.

F. Share and Observe With Other States

If another state has something good going for them, why should we do the same thing and try to rediscover the wheel? We do not share enough. We need to work on that more specifically.

G. Experience

Maintaining qualified state staff should probably include two specifics within the job description: (1) To secure an individual who has expertise in the field of the occupational experience area: In other words, if the position is agricultural education, hire a person who has experience in agricultural education, not some other vocational field. (2) To hire an individual who has achieved tenure. There should be a minimum number of years that a person has been involved in agricultural education at the instructor level prior to becoming a state employee.

Additional concerns were expressed in these areas:

(a) Graduation requirements for high school students - secondary students prepared to meet the requirements of 2 or 4 year college entry versus those of job entry. There has been an effort undertaken to counteract graduation requirements because they have had a tendancy to hamper enrollment at the secondary level.

(b) Grade involvement - A number of states are beginning to recognize 8th grade students as a part of the curriculum and in many cases may be providing credit as well as membership in the FFA. A definite policy should be established that can be used nationwide that will help the role and mission of 8th grade involvement.

(c) Extended employment - It was the feeling of the group that extended employment is a major concern. The concern is not so much in maintaining extended employment as it was in terms of the instructor. If the program has a quality instructor with a quality program then maintaining extended contracts is a lesser concern. Quantity is not the issue; instead the issue is quality in programs and instructors. Several states have implemented legislative action with requirements. That, in itself, does not solve the problem. Even though states have mandated state guidelines, even with dollars assessed, etc., states still will not have good feelings about extended employment unless there exists a quality program and a quality instructor.

4. Utilization of Others - Perhaps this point is really the area that we need to be examining under this topic. A host of individuals that may be utilized to assist us in maintaining effective leadership with reduced resources include:

A. Vocational Agriculture Instructors

Utilize them in whatever capacity that we can to assist us. Perhaps activities we have been conducting over the years could be conducted just as well by vocational agriculture instructors. If so, utilize them so that we can be free to do other things.

B. Grass Roots Involvement

Utilize the Alumni, Advisory Councils, local or State Foundations, and other organizations such as "Friends of Vocational Agriculture/FFA" to assist with conducting activities associated to agricultural education. Over the years it has been felt that we failed to delegate as well as we could have.

C. Political Aspect

We cannot neglect the political aspect as badly as we hate to say it. One state requires one person who serves on the local advisory council to be of a political background. The purpose was two fold: (1) Utilize those individuals to assist in promoting agricultural education at all levels, and (2) To make them aware of what agricultural education is all about. Therefore they are better able to assist us.

D. Partnership with the Industry of Agriculture

At the Postsecondary Conference held in Kansas City in October 1986, the theme was partnership with industry of agriculture. What are we doing as state staff to really work this industry and utilizing them to assist us in this crises?

E. Technical Skill Committees

The Federal Vocational Education Act requires the State Council to initiate technical skill committees. What are we doing to emphasize agriculture in terms of these technical skill committees that are being formed? Through these skill committees, we can develop resources that can enhance us in our task.

F. Farm Organizations/Commodity Groups

They are a valuable asset to us. We tend to use farm bureaus quite extensively. What about other farm organizations and commodity groups? They're willing to help. We need to approach them.

G. Involve Organizations Not Directly Involved in Agriculture

We tend to speak to our own groups at all times, yet the nonagricultural groups can be very influencial provided we utilize them to our advantage. (An example would be the Blount Foundation.)

H. Teacher Education

Perhaps we need to look at teacher education in a dual role. How can teacher education serve us in addition to preparing teachers? Through the "Request for Proposal" process they may be able to receive funds that can assist us in activities and involve us as consultants whereby we maintain our identity and work as a cooperative effort.

I. Secondary and Postsecondary Administration

Are we using our administrators? Many times administrators perceive our responsibility as establishing rules and regulations and look at us as "the black sheep," authoritative individual. With their involvement, they, too, could begin to understand. Many areas of poor communication could be dispelled and a new promising spirit come forward.

J. End Product

The end product that we are working with and striving to assist is that student enrolled in our secondary and postsecondary programs. If we are going to reach that end product, then we need to utilize our students as a means to assist us, but more importantly, the parents of those very students are very key. If our program will provide those quality measures that students need in order to achieve competency in a given occupational area of preparation for advanced education, our parents will then allow their students to be a part of agricultural education.